



Fisheries and Oceans  
Canada

Pacific Region  
Suite 200 – 401 Burrard Street  
Vancouver, British Columbia  
V6C 3S4

Pêches et Océans  
Canada

Région du Pacifique  
Pièce 200 – 401 rue Burrard  
Vancouver (C-B.)  
V6C 3S4

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To First Nations Chiefs, Councils and Fisheries Representatives,

I am writing this letter to inform you of the decision that the Department has made in relation to the feedback we have received following the two webinars that were held to discuss a revision to the management approach for Cultus and Late Run sockeye for 2018. The first call on July 23 was for First Nations only while the second call on July 25 was for First Nations and others (commercial, recreational and ENGO's). Both calls were well attended by First Nations and discussions were very constructive.

During both calls there was significant concern expressed by all participants on the status of Cultus sockeye and the conditions in Cultus Lake that are resulting in extremely poor survival rates for Cultus sockeye. Very strong views were expressed that a long term rebuilding plan needs to be developed with a focus on improving conditions in the lake environment combined with increased enhancement and continued harvest management actions. These actions will require a coordinated approach including First Nations, commercial and recreational fishers and all levels of Government (Federal, Provincial and Municipal).

With respect to 2018 fisheries management, input received reflected unanimous support for allowing management of Cultus and Late Run sockeye in accordance with the overall Late Run exploitation rate (~43% exploitation rate with current assumptions) once Late Run returns are at a level that Cultus Lake sockeye broodstock requirements are expected to be met. Below this level the exploitation rate would be limited to 20%. The Department's decision has been informed by this input and we will be proceeding with this approach for the 2018 season.

As discussed during the calls, DFO will be implementing changes to the Cultus enhancement program that are intended to improve returns of Cultus Lake sockeye going forward. Cultus Lake sockeye broodstock will be used to increase the number of smolts produced, as recent information indicates that both wild and enhanced fry have experienced very low survival to the smolt stage (1.1% to 1.5% in the last 3 years) which could result in the extinction of this stock if it continues, even in the absence of fishing. Increasing the number of enhanced smolts released into Sweltzer Creek should help to offset the poor fry to smolt survival, and will be the focus for enhancement actions in 2018.

Thank you very much for your engagement on this issue and the feedback that you have provided.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Nener

Director, Salmon Management and Client Services

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